

## ISSUE SUMMARY:

The EPA leads implementation of the multi-agency Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) to restore the Great Lakes ecosystem, enhance the economic health of the region, and ultimately improve public health protection for the area's 30 million Americans. The Great Lakes economy is one of the largest in the world, with a \$6 trillion gross regional product, making it the world's third largest economy and resulting in 51 million jobs. The direct economic benefits of restoring the Great Lakes are estimated to be at least \$50 billion, considering factors such as reduced costs for drinking water treatment; revenue from tourism, commercial fishing, and recreation; increased coastal property values; cost savings for municipalities; and jobs. A 2018 University of Michigan study shows that every dollar of federal spending on GLRI projects between 2010 and 2016 will produce \$3.35 in additional economic activity in the Great Lakes region through 2036.

## UPCOMING MILESTONES:

- **October-December 2020** – Publication of the following reports: Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) Report to Congress and the President; Great Lakes Lake Champlain Invasive Species Report to Congress; and Implementation Plan for The Great Lakes and Lake Champlain Invasive Species Program.
- **October 2020** – First public meeting of new Great Lakes Advisory Board
- **November/December 2020** - Re-charter the Great Lakes Advisory Board and appoint one new member.
- **November/December 2020** - EPA plans to issue the second Request for Applications under the Great Lakes Trash-Free Waters grant program for a total of \$5 million.
- **November/December 2020** – EPA plans to announce three new Great Lakes Legacy Act Project Agreements with non-federal sponsors

## BACKGROUND:

Through the GLRI, EPA leads 16 federal agencies in work focused on Great Lakes protection and restoration. The goal of the interagency collaboration, which has been in place since 2004, is to accelerate progress, avoid potential duplication of effort, and save money. In FY 2010 Congress began authorizing the GLRI as part of EPA's annual appropriations. Funding is used for projects performed by federal agencies, states, tribes, local governments, universities, and nongovernmental organizations. GLRI works to accelerate Great Lakes protection and restoration in the following areas:

- **Toxic Substances and Areas of Concern.** EPA in cooperation with our federal, state, tribal, local and private partners continues to accelerate the clean-up of Areas of Concern (AOC) – areas designated as the most contaminated sites on the Great Lakes under the 1987 Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement. AOCs are identified based on the presence of one of fourteen specific types of environmental degradation known as Beneficial Use Impairments or BUIs (e.g., Restrictions on Fish and Wildlife Consumption; Loss of Fish and Wildlife Habitat). An AOC can be removed from the list of AOCs ("delisted") after the particular BUIs at that AOC are removed through the implementation of various types of remedial activities known as "management actions." Once all BUIs in an AOC are removed, the AOC can begin the delisting process. Of the 31 AOCs originally identified in the U.S., five have been delisted leaving 26 AOCs left in the U.S. The remaining AOCs that still need to be cleaned up include Milwaukee Estuary (WI); Detroit River (MI); Cuyahoga River (OH); Grand Calumet River (IN); Niagara River (NY); and St. Louis River (MN).
- **Invasive Aquatic and Terrestrial Species.** Many of the more than 180 aquatic non-native species in the Great Lakes have propagated and spread, disrupting the food web and leading to added costs to drinking water treatment and economic impacts to commercial and recreational fishing. Sport fishing in the Great Lakes, which has been valued at \$7 billion annually, could be seriously impacted if Asian carp, which is currently a threat, or another species, were to invade. Invasive species can be virtually impossible to eradicate and have the potential to spread to the rest of the country through waterways, shipping, trade, and the activities of recreational and resource users. The GLRI is working to develop and enhance implementation of key species-specific (such as

Asian carp) “collaboratives” to support rapid responses and to communicate the latest control and management techniques.

- **Nonpoint Source pollution from agricultural and urban runoff.** Water quality near the shore has become degraded as is evident by harmful algal blooms, thick odorous mats of green algae, outbreaks of avian botulism, and “no-swim” advisories. Causes include excessive amounts of phosphorous and other nutrients running off from urban and agricultural areas; high concentrations of bacteria and other pathogens; and building and development in shoreline areas. Impacts include increased costs of drinking water treatment and limitations on recreational uses.
- **Reduced Habitat for Fish and Wildlife.** Current habitats do not meet the growth and reproductive needs of fish and wildlife. Habitat and species have been impacted by development, competition from invasive species, the alteration of natural lake level fluctuations and flows from dams and other control structures, toxic compounds, poor land management practices, and nonpoint sources of pollution. These impacts have led to loss of biodiversity and poorly functioning ecosystems, with impacts to commercial and recreational fishing.

*Highest GLRI Priorities:* Among the areas above, EPA places a priority on: 1) cleaning up areas of concern; 2) preventing introduction of more invasive species; and 3) reducing phosphorus contributions from agricultural and urban lands that contribute to harmful algal blooms and other water quality impairments.

*GLRI Establishment and Authorization:* In 2004, Executive Order 13340 established the Great Lakes Interagency Task Force and “Promotion of a Regional Collaboration of National Significance for the Great Lakes.” Building on this foundation, in FY 2010 Congress began authorizing the GLRI as part of annual appropriations. In 2016 Congress provided stand-alone authorization in Public Law 114-113. Each year, GLRI funds are appropriated to the EPA. The EPA implements and funds projects itself, but also provides over half of the appropriated GLRI funds to its partner federal agencies to use in implementing their projects or funding others. Federal agencies are now implementing the GLRI through a third action plan covering fiscal years 2020-2024.

*Commitment:* The US has various commitments for activities under the bi-national 2012 Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement between the US and Canada.

#### KEY EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS:

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|--|---|--|--|---|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Congress | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Industry          | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> States                               | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Tribes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Media | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other Federal Agency |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NGO      | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Local Governments | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other: <u>Canada, General Public</u> |  |   |  |

*Please describe specific concerns:* GLRI funding supplements, but does not supplant, other funds appropriated to the 16 agencies in the GLRI. The watershed includes two nations, eight U.S. states, two Canadian provinces, and more than 40 tribes. Stakeholders have concerns about maintaining GLRI resources to address the environmental issues identified in the background section of this paper.

#### MOVING FORWARD:

- Continue acceleration of Great Lakes protection and restoration at \$320 million annually – the amount directed by Congress, and proposed by the President, in recent years.

LEAD OFFICE/REGION: GLNPO/R5

OTHER KEY OFFICES/REGIONS: OW, ORD, R2, R3